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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LA PAZ 000055

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2019

TAGS: [BL](#) [ECON](#) [ETTC](#) [KDEM](#)

SUBJECT: FACEBOOK REMAINS YOUTH POLITICAL OUTLET IN BOLIVIA

REF: A. 08 LA PAZ 961

[¶](#)B. 08 LA PAZ 1004

Classified By: Acting ECOPOL Chief Brian Quigley for reasons 1.4(b, d.)

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The use of social networking groups and the internet is proliferating in Bolivia, despite the fact that relatively few Bolivians have access to the internet in their homes. Many of Bolivia's wealthier youth are using every resource available to promote their message, including Facebook, YouTube and BlogSpot. The technology is allowing for greater political activism among Bolivia's youth, which makes up two-thirds of its population. (ref A) These media outlets are used to disseminate information and connect regional movements to a national network, mainly among groups that oppose the Government and new Constitution. Giving up on simply opposing President Evo Morales, most opposition groups' goals now are to block the new constitution and promote a unified country. While some opposition extremists preach violence and racism, most members just hope for preserving Bolivia's democracy. Pro-government youth movements are very present in country, but are not yet taking full advantage of the networking site. END SUMMARY.

[¶](#)2. (U) Internet technology is a fast growing industry in Bolivia, but a March 2008 study reported that only 6.1% of Bolivians have internet in their homes. (ref B) Both rural and urban populations rely heavily on internet labs that have pay-by-the-hour computers and internet cafes. Despite this fact, the Bolivia network on Facebook had increased to 53,000 members by October 2008, up 32.5% in only six months. Facebook and other sites have also seen growth in participation from high poverty level regions, including the Amazon basin and El Alto.

[¶](#)3. (C) With an increasingly polarized political environment, Facebook has become a refuge for anti-Evo forces. At first, most groups vented their feelings regarding Morales and his Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) supporters. The most popular groups now seem to have accepted that Morales is the Bolivian president after his resounding August 10 victory, where he received a 67% national approval rating and are shifting to an issue that they can conceivably influence, the January vote on the new constitution. Constitution groups are the most popular, with both for and against groups having around 300 members each. The most popular remains "Before I Vote On the New Constitution, I Will Read the Text," with over 1200 members. The bulk of Facebook support for Morales continues

to come from abroad, mostly left-leaning college-aged individuals. The most popular one, "Support Bolivian President Evo Morales," has 1800 members, in comparison to the "Evo Will Leave Office When This Group Reaches 10,000," which now boasts over 12,500 users.

¶4. (C) Morales is not the only person with a Facebook presence. Another heated Facebook debate is over detained Pando governor Leopoldo Fernandez. Several groups support his release while others criticize his behavior and call him a "dog." Similar groups now exist for Santa Cruz Civic Committee President Branko Marinkovic, with half hailing his opposition role and half calling for his detainment. Even Ambassador Goldberg had a Facebook group created in his honor after he was declared persona-non-grata in September. The group, "I support and appreciate Philip Goldberg," encompasses 366 members from all over Bolivia.

¶5. (C) There is a growing movement among youth that don't support Morales, but have been so disgusted by the actions of the sometimes extreme Santa Cruz Youth Group, Union Juventil Crucenista (UJC,) that they find themselves defending the MAS. The racist attitudes that exist, certainly not just on Facebook, continue to cause a major rift between Cruceno (from Santa Cruz) opposition groups and Paceno (from La Paz) opposition groups. It has become such a problem that there are over half a dozen groups dedicated to ending "Facebook racism."

¶6. (C) One relatively new member of the Facebook political

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scene, Diego Bracamonte, saw the divide and is trying to conquer it, hoping to bring together the two groups over something they can agree on: blocking the new constitution. Bracamonte has created several groups, all starting with "Juventud:" Juventud Chukuta, Juventud Kochala, Juventud Autonomista, among others. His groups all link back to "Juventud Nationalista Boliviana" that tries to connect the youth movements throughout the country, from El Alto to Tarija. Membership nation-wide is growing, and Bracamonte seems to straddle the line between Pacenos and Crucenos without offending either group. Both sides seem to be embracing the idea, with UJCers and members of the La Paz-based "Plaza Avaroa" joining their respective regional groups and the national one as well. Juventud Kochala is Cochabamba-based group with over 4,000 members. One Cochabambino leader, Rodrigo Valdivia Gomez, has already launched his presidential campaign on the site for the anticipated 2009 elections.

¶7. (C) Emboff spoke with Valdivia January 9, who could not stress the importance of Facebook for his civic group enough. "We have no other way to communicate - we're an organization of youth without the resources of the MAS political movement. Facebook allows me to contact all of my members instantly." Valdivia, whose interest in politics started at age 14, says that the technology has allowed him to connect with other country's youth movements, including Venezuela. Juventud Kochala was formed two years ago and has already been active in their "No" campaign for over a month. The group helped spur the formation of the other related "Juventud" groups by Bracamonte. It's not without risk, however. Valdivia said that the well-funded MAS supporters yell and insult them at rallies and recently, Valdivia himself has received threats. It didn't appear to worry him much, as he told Emboff, "There will always be the intolerant people. There will always be those that don't want to hear our beliefs...and that's exactly why our movement is important."

¶8. (C) Facebook is only one of many methods that Bolivian youth use to spread their message. In coordination with Facebook, many groups have also linked with "blogspot.com," which allows for further information dissemination and event planning, particularly for those that are not members of Facebook. Bracamonte co-supports

"juventudnationalistabolivia.blogspot.com" to compliment his Facebook groups to reach the widest audience. "Noalaconstitution.blogspot.com" is also popular, with a page devoted to El Alto youth. "Jovenes Altenos En Defensa De La Democracia" say that they want "the change," they want Morales to finish his term, but they reject "totalitarianism" that threatens to divide the country. The site also gives the users the opportunity to post their own take on the Constitution and how it might effect them.

"Realidadenbolivia.blogspot.com," ironically uses a Simon Bolivar quote against the Government and tries to counter the Morales spin-machine with their own telling of what is happening.

¶9. (C) While YouTube.com is an international sensation, the Bolivian youth movements are not using the site. Some have posted news clips from the violence over the past year, but most Bolivian content is posted from abroad. The most viewed are by a British Independent filmgroup, Journeyman Pictures. Since the mid-90's, the organization has published four separate videos about Bolivia, which Journeyman calls a "niche" in news reporting. The videos are leftward leaning, with one February 2007 piece entitled "Cocaine Factories," garnering nearly a quarter of a million views. The six-minute video glamorizes the coca industry and Morales' "Coca Yes, Cocaine No" plan, while also criticizing the U.S. for pressuring Bolivia to decrease coca cultivation. Associated Press and Al Jazeera also post their news stories, including Al Jazeera's "The Bolivian President on His Country's Crisis," which featured a UN-sidelined interview with Morales on September 25, 2008.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: With over two-thirds of Bolivia's nine million people under 30, the youth movement is bound to gain

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influence. As the internet continues to expand in Bolivia, it can and will be used for political campaigning by increasing numbers of youth on both sides of the political spectrum. Although Facebook users represent a small percentage of the population, the problems they are facing are a microcosm for the country as a whole. If the current youth leaders can successfully use this technology to link opposition groups across the country, there is a chance that their unity will serve as an example for their ever-fragmented middle-aged counterparts. END COMMENT.

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